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SUBJECT: YASTRZHEMSKY VISIT HAILED AS SIGNALING WARMING IN
POLISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Classified By: Polcouns Mary T. Curtin, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Polish officials told us they hope the January 20 visit to Poland by Sergei Yastrzhembsky, an advisor to Russian President Vladimir Putin, will signal the end of the "mini cold war" between Russia and Poland. Yastrzhembsky discussed a potential meeting between Putin and Polish President Lech Kaczynski at a neutral site and restarting the bilateral economic commission. Polish officials have no illusions that relations with Russia will be easy, but hope they can at least be constructive. End Summary.

2. (C) Wojciech Zajaczkowski, Polish MFA Director for Eastern Policy, said Yastrzhembsky was originally invited by Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz on a "private visit," but that it took on greater political significance with the delivery of a letter from Putin to Kaczynski. Zajaczkowski was optimistic that the visit signaled a serious intention on the part of the Russians to change the atmosphere in bilateral relations. Yastrzhembsky and Polish officials discussed the possibility of a meeting between Putin and Kaczynski in some third country. According to Zajaczkowski, the Russians appear lately to have realized that their aggressive approach to Poland over the past 18 months did not get them what they expected (i.e., Polish acquiescence to Russian aims in the region), and in fact had the opposite effect.

3. (C) Zajaczkowski said the Poles have no illusion that things will be easy with Russia. They are pleased that Putin appears to be taking a conciliatory approach toward Kaczynski in his first months in office, but some very basic differences of approach remain, especially with regard to each country's vision of the "destiny" of Eastern Europe. Poland, said Zajaczkowski, wants to stimulate modernization in the region by bringing Eastern Europe into the European fold. The Russians want to keep the countries in the area close to Moscow, which has political as well as economic consequences. Zajaczkowski expected continuing differences because of these competing visions, but hoped relations could be more constructive.

4. (C) The Director of Foreign Affairs at the Presidential Chancellery, Mariusz Handzlik, was also cautiously optimistic in describing the import of Yastrzhembsky's visit. He said the Poles want to create a "roadmap" to better relations, but the relationship has to be based on an equal footing. He said no date or place had been set for a Putin-Kaczynski meeting, but that it would be on "independent ground." In his meeting with Yastrzhembsky, Kaczynski emphasized Polish priorities, including its close ties with the U.S. and EU, energy security, and good trade relations. He also, according to Handzlik, emphasized Poland's interest in a democratic Russia in which human rights are respected. Kaczynski and Yastrzhembsky did not, Handzlik said, discuss Ukraine, because Poland did not want to "provoke" any problems at the meeting.

5. (C) The major concrete outcome is that the long-postponed bilateral economic commission is now scheduled to start meeting. Commission meetings have been put off repeatedly since the fall of 2004, when Russia became angered at Polish involvement in resolving the dispute over elections in neighboring Ukraine. Handzlik said there are a number of commercial issues, including regarding agricultural exports, which President Kaczynski would like resolved.

6. (C) Comment: The Yastrzhembsky visit was heavily covered in the press, with considerable attention paid to what was described as Kaczynski's unusual decision to break with protocol and meet with Yastrzhembsky, who is "only" a presidential advisor. Polish officials seem realistic about chances for smooth relations, but very hopeful that the two countries can move past the problems of the past 18 months. End Comment.
ASHE